Experience of an Athena SWAN panellist

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LONDON MATHEMATICAL SOCIETY
GOOD PRACTICE
SCHEME

Athena SWAN panel

- Seven members, chaired by a Learned Society administrator.

  * Three university academics.
  * Three university administrators.
  * Four women and three men.

- English, Scottish and Welsh universities represented.

Athena SWAN applications

- Considered seven applications from departments for Athena SWAN awards
- Four applications for Athena SWAN Bronze awards

  * Two successful, one asked for more information and one unsuccessful

- Three applications for Athena SWAN Silver awards

  * One successful, one given a Bronze award and one unsuccessful

Athena SWAN Bronze/Silver Departmental award submission

a. Demonstrates what an individual department is **planning** (Bronze) or **doing** (Silver) to work towards equality in the career progression of women and men in SET, in addition to university-wide policies.

b. Demonstrates initiatives are **planned** (Bronze) or are **underway** (Silver) to increase numbers of female students where they are underrepresented.

c. For applications for Silver awards, demonstrates the **impact** of these activities so far.

Athena SWAN Bronze/Silver Departmental award

An Athena SWAN Departmental application is judged in the following areas:

1. Letter of endorsement from Head of Department

2. The self-assessment process

3. A picture of the department

4. Supporting and advancing womens careers

   i) Key career transition points

   ii) Career development

   iii) Organisation and culture

   iv) Flexibility and managing career breaks

5. Any other comments

6. Action plan

7. Case Studies (Silver award only)

Baseline data and analysis

Data are now included under the appropriate headings throughout the application form and consequently data should be embedded within the text rather than separated in appendices.

Key things panels consider when assessing each section

- Have data been provided for the past three years? If some data are unavailable, has an explanation been given for this and ways documented for collecting this information in future?

- When graphical illustrations have been used, are these effective in showing the main challenges and achievements over time?

- Is there an assessment of how the department compares with others in its discipline using benchmarking data? Are the comparators used relevant?

- Does the commentary provide a reflective narrative on what the data indicate?

- Has the department used qualitative data where appropriate (e.g. small sample sizes, the need to probe in greater depth)?

1. Letter of endorsement from Head of Department

- Does the letter highlight the role Athena SWAN plays in relation to the overall university and department strategies and demonstrate the personal commitment of the Head of Department?

- For applications for Silver awards, if the department already holds a Bronze award, have additional initiatives or actions been implemented since the award was made and is there recognition of the benefits of Athena SWAN work?

- The panel felt that ideally the Head of Department letter should talk about a strategic vision, but none of them did!

2. The self-assessment process

- Does the Self-Assessment Team have a diverse membership?

- When was the Team formed and how often does it meet?

- What wider consultation has taken place?

- Is there evidence of engagement and support for the Athena SWAN Charter at a senior level?

- For applications for Bronze awards, is there evidence of a commitment to culture change in the department which will affect staff at all levels?

- For application for Silver awards, is there evidence of real culture change in the department which affects staff at all levels?

- The panel felt it was very important that the senior management team of the department were seen to be fully engaged with the process (and be represented on the team).

3. A picture of the department

- Is there anything about the institution and/or department that needs to be taken into consideration when judging the submission?

- Any specific comments to be made in relation to the academic and research staff or student profiles?

- There was a feeling that many applications were too complacent/placid about what the current structures/situation was without any attempt to consider trying to change things if that would be helpful. There was a need to be seen to be taking or planning pro-active actions.

- The panel really wanted an honest assessment of where the department is and were not happy if they thought applications were trying to hide something or were just too complacent.

- The data does need to be complete and well presented – and then (very importantly) there needs to be honest reflection on what the data is saying, what the key issues are and what actions are proposed to try and address the issues. The panel really liked an application that referred to the action plan in the main text.

- If there are different groups within the department of different natures then the data should be separated out for each group.

4. Supporting and advancing womens careers

- Does the department have initiatives **planned** (Bronze) or **in place** (Silver) to support women at key career transition points, advance and support womens career progression, enable flexible working, support and manage career breaks and improve the culture through increasing visibility of women for example, that are above and beyond legal requirements and any university-wide initiatives?

- For an application for a Bronze award, is there evidence of current activity at least under some of the headings and future actions planned under all of the headings?

- For a Silver award is there a record of current activities and future actions under each of the headings?

- How well informed are these activities (e.g. does the data evidence the need for these the activities)? For example has progress been made on recruiting, retaining and advancing womens careers? Are there rising numbers of women being employed and/or appointed to senior positions?

- For an application for a Silver award, how successful are the activities? What impact have these had?

- Are there any particularly innovative or interesting initiatives?

- **Organisation and culture**

  * A diagram of committees and reporting structures was seen to be a good thing.

  * Some departments had committees, e.g. promotion and research, made up of professors (all male) that made key decisions – this was not liked.

  * Careful placing of women on important strategic committees was liked. This is particually important for departments with very few women.

  * Having Athena SWAN activities recognised in workload planning (for all the team) would go down very well.

  * It was thought that the chair should have a similar allowance to chairs of other major department committees – but it wasn't clear that this happened very often.

- **Flexibility and managing career breaks**

  * Many departments had informal flexible working/paternity leave without anything being requested formally.

  * Keeping in Touch days were mentioned a few times but there wasn't much description of how these were used to help the woman's career (rather than the department's!).

5. Any other comments

- Is there any other contextual information that should be taken into account when assessing the submission?

- The panel wanted departments to be thinking pro-actively about how to recruit more women members of staff – just adding something to advertisements or having one woman on an interview panel wasn't really seen as enough.

6. Action plan

- For departments holding Bronze who are applying for Silver, is there evidence from the previous Action Plan of progress against targets listed? Additionally, has the original plan been updated and modified?

- Does the action plan have targeted actions, outcome/success measures, clear responsibilities and timelines?

- Does the action plan cover the full 3 years (the validity of the award)?

- Are the targets ambitious yet realistic?

- Have the actions arisen from the priorities identified in the previous sections?

- The panel felt that most of the action plans were too vague – they wanted concrete, realistic targets. There was an acceptance that if figures were already above the national average then a realistic target might be just to maintain this.

7. Case study: impacting on individuals

- For applications for Silver awards only; one case study should be about a member of the self assessment team and another about another individual within the department.

- Has the inclusive culture of the department supported/enabled the career progression of individuals working in the department?

General points (for the panel)

- Does the submission meet the standard for the award (as set out in the award guidance)?

- How well does the submission analyse and use their data to inform their policies and practices?

- Are there any particularly innovative and interesting initiatives?

- Are there any glaring errors or omissions?

- What is the overall quality of the submission?